



Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Voluntary Report - fas internal use only

Date: 8/17/2000

GAIN Report #DA0022

Denmark

Market Development Reports

GMO Test Results of Soya and Corn Products

Surprise Food Sector

2000

Approved by:

Philip A. Letarte

U.S. Embassy

Prepared by:

Hasse Kristensen

Report Highlights:

GMOs were found in almost one third of randomly tested soy and corn products in Denmark. Ten percent of all products tested had a GMO content above 3 percent but were not labeled. These results surprised the industry and retailers, as well as consumers. The Food Minister, Ms. Ritt Bjerregaard, calls the findings unacceptable.

Includes PSD changes: No

Includes Trade Matrix: No

Unscheduled Report

Copenhagen [DA1], DA

Following reports in the summer 1999 that GMO's were detected in certain health foods in Norway, the former Danish Food Minister, Henrik Dam Kristensen, was asked by the left wing party in the Parliament, the Unity List, to carry out a study of GMO content in Danish food products.

The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration conducted the survey of GM material from maize and soya in 103 foods between February and July, 2000. The purpose of the survey was to gain insight into the use of GM material in the Danish market and to assess whether food safety inspections in private firms were effective.

On August 3, 2000, the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration, Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, announced the results of 103 tests of food products containing soybean and corn ingredients. The samples were collected from February to March 2000.

Results Made Public

DNA could not be detected in 25 of the sampled products, such as corn starch, corn flakes and other breakfast cereals, so they could not be further analyzed for GMO levels. Out of the remaining 78 samples, 25 contained GMO products within the one percent EU threshold and eight showed GMO levels between 2 and 3 percent. None of the samples were labeled, even though products with more than 1 percent legally require labeling. The majority of the eight products with more than 1 percent GMO were meat products with soybean protein, but they also included cake mix with corn and a protein drink.

Negative Press Fallout

The Danish press covered the story in all daily newspapers for the entire week following the disclosure. The Food Minister, Ritt Bjerregaard, has publicly stated that consumers should know whether a product contains GMOs and called the results of the tests unacceptable. She wanted to publish the names of the companies that violated the labeling legislation and complained about the lack of legislation to allow her to do so. Nevertheless, the press which published names which they somehow obtained.

Withdrawal of Products

The companies with the eight products exceeding the 1 percent level all claim to produce only GM free products and have verification from their supplier(s) that the raw materials are also GMO free. They have consequently withdrawn the products from the market. The Danish retail sector accepts that the GMO content in these food products is unintentional and that the withdrawal of the products reinforces the companies' policies not to sell GMO products.

Reliability of Government Testing Methods Questioned.

The companies involved supposedly test their products using the "Realtime" method, reportedly a more expensive but also a more reliable method than the "PCR" method used by the Food Ministry. The

two major Danish industry organizations, Danish Industries and the Agricultural Council, say that the unreliable PCR method creates unnecessary consumer concern. In response to questions about the reliability of the tests, the Ministry and the EU Institute for Health and Consumer Protection maintain that the PCR analyses are accurate. The results were apparently verified by three different laboratories.

Office of AgAffairs Comments

The Food Ministry stressed that the analyses only reflect the specific samples and admits that other similar products could have different GMO levels. Since unintentional GM contamination could be unevenly distributed in the production process, a small sample size may give an incorrect picture of the entire production. The Danish Government insist that EU regulations require that each product, such as one candy bar, must be labeled if the GMO level in that package exceeds 1 percent.

The Veterinary and Food Administration has told us that they do not plan further testing, especially since they feel the press coverage of the results has intensified the pressure on food suppliers to avoid GMOs in their products in Denmark, a nearly impossible challenge..

The disclosure that there are non-labeled GMO products probably has not affected the already negative consumer attitudes toward GMOs. Danish consumers widely use the term "GMO-contaminated food," which reflects their attitudes toward GM products.

The results of the testing, whether they are accurate or not, has triggered discussions between the Government and private firms on how the labeling requirement can practically be applied in the future. As it stands now, all retailers will request guarantees from their suppliers that their products are GMO free.